

# Formal Writing Guidelines

1. Contractions are appropriate only for conversational and informal writing, never for technical or formal writing. Therefore, spell the words that form a contraction rather than use the contraction.
  - a. Can't = cannot
  - b. Won't = will not
  - c. Couldn't = could not
  - d. Shouldn't = should not
2. FANBOYS are not appropriate sentence starters. Essentially, poorly written, weak, and ineffective sentences begin with...  
for . . . and . . . nor . . . but . . . or . . . yet . . . so
3. The use of first person is considered informal. I, me, we, us etc. should be removed from formal writing, unless given the authority to use I, me, or we to provide some level of expertise in an academic field or personal experience.
4. Slang, symbols, and abbreviations do not belong in formal writing. Remember, this is not an email or text message. Particularly offensive items include the following:
  - a. & = and
  - b. w/ = with
  - c. w/out = without
  - d. b/c = because
  - e. lol = laugh out loud
  - f. thru=through or threw
5. If the thesis or topic statement is some derivation of “**\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_ are very unique/different but also very similar**” revise and rethink the thesis or topic statement significantly. WHAT characteristics are unique/different, WHAT characteristics are similar?  
**Inappropriate** – The Gentleman's Agreement and Chinese Exclusion Act were very different but also similar.  
**Appropriate**– The Gentleman's Agreement and Chinese Exclusion Act were similar in that they were both caused by racism and fear that was directed toward restricting the rights of Asian populations in the Western United States, but unique in which groups were targeted.  
  
In addition, “*This paper will,*” “*I will,*” “*While reading this paper,*” and “*In this paper the author's . . .*” can be redundant and dumb down the thesis statement for the reader. It is assumed that whatever critical thoughts were discovered, they were discovered while reading the research. A thesis statement should creatively address what will be discussed within an essay.  
**Inappropriate** – In this paper, I will discuss how The Gentleman's Agreement and Chinese Exclusion Act were very different but also similar.  
**Appropriate**– The Gentleman's Agreement and Chinese Exclusion Act were similar in that they were both caused by racism and fear that was directed toward restricting the rights of Asian populations in the Western United States, but unique in which groups were targeted.
6. Use commas in a series before the coordinating conjunction. To avoid ambiguity in writing, a good rule to remember is that lists are meant to be collections of equals, which means there should be just as many separators. Rather than *I love to run, bike and swim*, revise to *I love to run, bike, and swim*.

7. Eliminate passive voice as much as possible. Prevent this by making sure the subject of the sentence is actively completing the verb. Writing actively also eliminates wordiness.
  - a. Passive – The paper was graded by the teacher
  - b. ACTIVE – The teacher graded the paper
  - c. Passive – The rubric was reviewed extensively by the student
  - d. ACTIVE – The student extensively reviewed the rubric
8. When the assignment calls for a **PARAGRAPH** the following do not qualify
  - a. Three to four unrelated sentences
  - b. A bullet pointed list
  - c. An assortment of words that lack a topic sentence and supporting evidence and in the most egregious cases no subjects or verbs
  - d. A short essay masquerading as a paragraph
9. In formal writing, spell numbers that can be written in two words or less. This is different from business writing, where numbers one through ten can be written in standard form.
10. Watch the overuse of direct quotes and paraphrased material.
11. Eliminate the creation of your own means of source citations – MLA format was developed with the writer in mind.